

STATE CAPITOL
P.O. BOX 942849
SACRAMENTO, CA 94249-0053
(916) 319-2053
FAX (916) 319-2153

DISTRICT OFFICE
320 WEST 4TH STREET, SUITE 1050
LOS ANGELES, CA 90013
(213) 620-4646
FAX (213) 620-6319

E-MAIL
Assemblymember.Santiago@assembly.ca.gov



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June 26, 2020

The Honorable Gavin Newsom
Governor, State of California
State Capitol, First Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Increased Protections and Support for Domestic Violence Survivors and Shelters

Dear Governor Newsom:

We are writing to respectfully urge you to respond to the desperate needs of domestic violence survivors and shelters across California. As the state begins to open its economy and adjust to a new normal, social distancing will continue to be a necessary protocol in reducing the spread of the virus. Though public health is of paramount concern, we must pay special attention to our vulnerable populations.

Unfortunately, COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines have inadvertently created the perfect environment for domestic abuse to thrive. Since the statewide stay-at-home order was implemented, domestic violence shelters and hotlines have experienced a 40 percent surge in calls, whereas some counties have reported a concerning drop in calls. Many law enforcement agencies are attributing the drop in calls to increased abuser surveillance of activities in the home. Meanwhile, domestic violence shelters are struggling to keep up with the increased calls for help and critical supplies. Given that traditional avenues for relief such as family, friends, work, school, and shelters are becoming increasingly out of reach, it is imperative that California respond swiftly to the needs of domestic violence victims.

To support domestic violence survivors and domestic violence shelters during COVID-19, I request the following actions:

- An allocation of personal protective equipment specifically designated for domestic violence shelters. These shelters are providing first-responder type services and it is incumbent upon us to keep these critical service providers safe as they serve our most vulnerable.
- A request to the California Judicial Council to automatically extend Restraining Order After Hearings (ROAH) to eliminate the need to file for renewal. While the California Judicial Council has granted an automatic extension of existing Temporary Restraining

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Orders, it is important that we take this a step further and grant ROAHs automatic extension to alleviate inevitable expirations during the stay-at-home orders that may jeopardize victim safety.

- A call to action for all California Courts to implement e-filing of family orders as immediately as possible. Until stay-at-home orders are completely lifted, families living with their abusers will face increased risk of harm. Providing another means of relief through e-filing can be an important safety mechanism for families seeking legal protection.
- Finally, we urge you to consider this particularly vulnerable population as you continue to respond to COVID-19 and navigate the post-COVID era. Strengthening the support for domestic violence survivors and shelters when crafting post-COVID policies, protocols, and economic stimulus will help ensure that this group in need is not left behind.

Californians are enduring job loss, social isolation, school disruption, and financial stress all while living under a constant fear of contracting COVID-19. Amid the current public health crisis, it is important that we continue to account for and support domestic violence survivors given that they are confronting a double-edged pandemic of their own, facing dangers both inside and outside of their homes. While you have taken extraordinary steps to address the unique needs of many California communities, we ask that you extend such support to the desperate needs of domestic violence survivors and shelters.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. For questions, please contact my office at (916) 319-2053.

Sincerely,

MIGUEL SANTIAGO
Assembly Member, 53rd District

EDUARDO GARCIA
Assembly Member, 56th District

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MIGUEL SANTIAGO
ASSEMBLYMEMBER, FIFTY-THIRD DISTRICT

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